

**For immediate release
June 17, 2008**

CONSERVATION PRACTICES PROTECT LAND FROM EROSION

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MANCHESTER- Recent rains have caused severe erosion in much of the agricultural land surrounding Bear Creek, causing soil and nutrients from the land to wash into the creek. While most areas suffered significant damage, the amount of damage was reduced on many farms who had added conservation practices to their land with the help of the Bear Creek Watershed Project.

The Bear Creek Watershed Project, which has been underway since 2005, aims to improve the creek's water by improving the area of land that drains into the creek, or the watershed. By using conservation practices, which decrease the amount of erosion on the land, residents can improve the quality of the creek.

"Grassed waterways and terraces are probably the best practice to add to your land at this point," said Mike Freiburger, project coordinator. "These practices will help prevent further erosion."

Wayne Brunsman, a farmer in Delaware County, added terraces and grassed waterways to his property. He also uses no-till farming, which uses last year's crop as ground cover to protect against erosion.

"I would say that I have about 10 percent of the amount of erosion that most people in the area are experiencing right now," said Brunsman. "I think that I have these practices to thank for that."

Local farmer Larry Willenborg, who has used conservation practices on his farm for many years, estimates that the area lost more soil this year than in the some past years combined.

"It's years like this that make you glad that you added these practices," Willenborg said.

Not only do conservation practices help farmers save valuable topsoil, but they also keep that soil out of the creek. Soil that washes into the creek can make the water cloudy, and may carry with it bacteria and excess nutrients.

According to Freiburger, more residents have become interested in adding conservation practices to their land since flooding began this summer. Financial and technical help is available for landowners looking to add conservation practices to their land, but construction for certain projects may be delayed until later this fall when the ground dries.

To learn more about the project, contact project coordinator Mike Freiburger at (563) 927-4250 or Michael.Freiburger@ia.nacdnet.net.

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